

hearts. While a grateful nation could never adequately express their debt to men like George Bennett, it should take every opportunity to honor them and their families for the sacrifice they have paid on our behalf.

TRIBUTE TO JENNIFER LAWSON

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, this week the Vermont Department of Education announced that Jennifer Lawson of Waltham, VT, has been named Vermont's 2011 Teacher of the Year. I am proud to call her selection to the Senate's attention, and I offer hearty congratulations to Ms. Lawson and thank her for her dedication to the students of Vermont.

A graduate of the University of Vermont with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in education from Connecticut College, Jennifer Lawson has spent 12 years in the classroom. Prior to her current role as a social studies and language arts teacher at Vergennes Union High School, she taught as an elementary school teacher in Vergennes. Her success as an educator stems from her ability to inspire students to challenge themselves and their peers in a positive learning environment. She champions her students' individuality and encourages them to bring their life experiences into the classroom.

In Vermont, schools are at the core of our communities. Our kids are the seed corn of the future that we want for our state and its people. Vermonters understand the importance of giving our children a quality education, and they understand that a child's education begins well before their first day of school and will continue long after their last graduation day. Jennifer Lawson brings this philosophy into practice every time she enters the classroom. She recognized quickly that educating students involves so much more than just talking about a subject.

Even outside the classroom Jennifer is involved in improving the education in her community. She serves on several of her school's committees, including the Adequate Yearly Progress Team for Literacy; she is a coleader of the Afterschool Program for Reading and Math; and she serves as a member on the assessment design and research team. Along with her efforts close to home she has been published nationally on alternative energy sources for schools and has given a presentation on Expeditionary Learning Schools for Outward Bound. I am glad that she will expand her role within our State even further this year as she consults with other educators throughout Vermont in her role as Teacher of the Year.

As I told Jennifer when I called her this week, Marcelle and I are proud of her and the extraordinary work she does on behalf of Vermont children. Vermont will be superbly represented in the national competition for Teacher of the Year next spring. I congratu-

late her on this honor, and I hope she spends many more years inspiring young minds.

I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of an article in The Burlington Free Press about Ms. Lawson.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From Burlington FreePress.com]

VERGENNES TEACHER IS STATE'S BEST, JENNIFER LAWSON PLAYS TO HER STUDENTS' STRENGTHS

(By Lynn Monty)

Teacher Jennifer Lawson looked classy—but cool—dressed in tall green leather boots that matched her mohair vest and nail polish this morning as she guided her class through a lesson called “echoes.”

One student said, “They say I’m spoiled” as another echoed back, “I say I’m fortunate.”

Another said, “They say I’m a geek,” as another echoed back, “I say they don’t know me.”

The students wrote each statement and echo. The exercise is just one of the many tools 38-year-old Lawson, of Waltham, uses to empower her students and is part of the reason she was chosen 2011 Vermont Teacher of the Year.

Lawson is a middle school language arts and social studies teacher at Vergennes Union High School. As winner of the state award, she will travel across Vermont to work with other teachers and compete for the National Teacher of the Year award. In the spring, she heads to Washington for a reception at the White House. Lawson is a native Vermonter who has worked at VUHS for six years.

“It’s amazing, humbling and flattering,” Lawson said. “It’s an award for my students more so than for me because it’s the students who get me excited.”

Lawson said it’s important to her to know students individually and to recognize who they are. She said her goal as a teacher is to celebrate her students and broaden their perspective of the world. “In a lot of ways school is home away from home,” she said. “The experiences here should be celebrated and connections should be made with their life experiences outside of school.”

Lawson taught at Vergennes Union Elementary School prior to taking the position at the high school. She has 12 years of classroom experience and holds a master’s of education from Connecticut College and a bachelor’s in elementary education from the University of Vermont.

Lawson’s father, Robert Lawson, recently retired from the University of Vermont after 44 years of teaching. He has observed his daughter in the classroom on many occasions.

“It’s a wonderful recognition,” he said of the award. “Jennifer is very fond of this community. She gives from her heart and mind and she teaches her students to problem-solve, to be cooperative, to read and to be friendly. I am just very happy for her today.”

As students left the soft lighting and comfy couches in Jennifer Lawson’s classroom to attend the assembly being held in her honor, eighth-grader Dana Ambrose, 13, praised his teacher. “She’s really great and helps us a lot. Personally I don’t read that great, but she has helped me improve. I am thankful for that. She’s a great teacher and just loves to help everybody.”

Vermont Education Board Chairwoman Fayneese Miller said that when the Depart-

ment of Education chooses a teacher of the year, the goal is to choose someone who has the ability to excite young people, to encourage them to use their imagination and to think about possibilities. “I think that’s what she embodies,” Miller said. “She cares about her students and loves learning and encourages learning in her students. She’s a highly effective teacher.”

But it’s not only the students that Lawson is teaching. Para-educator Erika Lynch is a newly licensed teacher who has been working alongside Lawson for two years.

“Being in rooms with her is really good for me because I can learn from her,” Lynch said. “I am picking up things that hopefully I can use one day in my own classroom. Jenn creates a learning community where kids feel safe and take chances, where they are challenged but they are able to meet those challenges. It’s because she meets kids at their level. She does a great job of creating an environment that makes it easier for kids to learn.”

Miller introduced Lawson at the assembly. “By the round of applause it is obvious Jennifer Lawson is someone who is revered, respected and loved,” she said.

As Lawson accepted the crystal apple that Miller handed her, she received a standing ovation from the packed auditorium and said above the din, “I love my job and I love you guys.”

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

ARKANSAS’S FINALISTS FOR “TEACHER OF THE YEAR”

● Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, today I congratulate 14 Arkansas teachers who were recently named regional finalists for Arkansas Teacher of the Year. These educators represent the best of our State, and I join all Arkansans to thank them for their efforts to educate and inspire our Arkansas youth. These teachers devote themselves to ensuring a bright, successful future for their students, and I commend them for their pursuit of professional excellence and their dedication to learning and knowledge.

The finalists are Blair Ballard, Walnut Ridge Elementary; Vickie Beene, an English teacher at Nashville High School; Julie Boyd, Hurricane Creek Elementary in Bryant; Jeannette Dempsey, College Hill Elementary, Texarkana; Oretha Faye Ferguson, an English teacher at Fort Smith Southside High School; Karen S. Hart, a biology teacher at Jonesboro High School; Kristy Parish, Westside Elementary, Searcy; Mary Katherine Parson, a biology teacher at Little Rock Central; Kathy A. Powers, Simon Intermediate School, Conway; Therese Thompson, John Tyson Elementary, Springdale; Rebecca Vaughn, Wedlock Elementary, West Memphis; Maryann Walker, M.A. Hardin Elementary, White Hall; Carolyn Whisenant, Mountain Home Kindergarten; and Emily Kathryn White, Monticello Elementary. ●

ARKANSAS BLUES AND HERITAGE FESTIVAL

● Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, today I celebrate the 25th anniversary of the